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Indian Miniatures

La Salle University Art Museum

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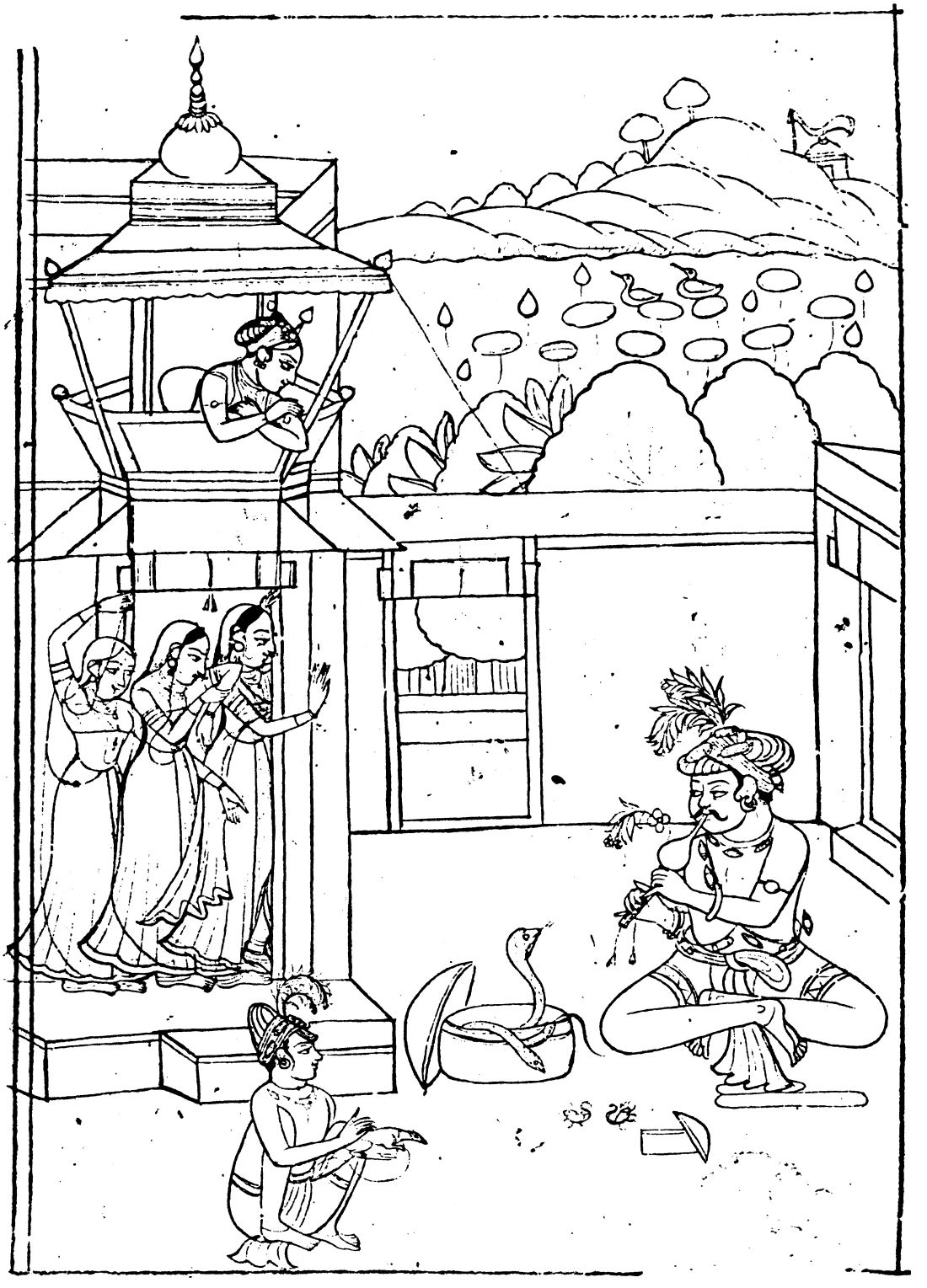
INDIAN MINIATURES



INDIAN
MINIATURE
PAINTING

(17th - 19th centuries)

La Salle College Art Gallery

April - June, 1980

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Although the emphasis of the La Salle collection is on Western art, the Art Gallery is very fortunate to have a small number of objects which give insight into two areas of Oriental Art: 19th century Japanese woodcut prints and Indian paintings and drawings of the 17th - 19th centuries.

This exhibition, which concerns itself with the latter category, is small but perhaps appropriately so. The very precise technique, the wealth of exquisite detail and delicacy of the works in general require contemplation and careful study in order to be fully appreciated. But before discussing Indian painting of the 17th - 19th centuries, we should give a brief background of the historical development of India as a nation.

Seeking territory for new settlements in the 16th century, Mongol or Mughal conquerors from Central Asia (descendants of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane) invaded India and established themselves in power by 1526. The Mughal Empire held sway over most of the many princely, feudal states which made up India until 1757, although from 1803 on their power became nominal, and was gradually replaced by the British. By 1757 India became part of the British Empire and remained principally under British rule until achieving independence in 1949.

Throughout Mughal and British rule in India each of the semi-independent states (many of which had been in existence since the 9th century) maintained their own provincial rulers, courts, local customs, traditions and language. It is the great cultural as well as geographical diversity of these states which account for the growth of distinct schools of native Indian painting (hereafter referred to as Rajput painting). Such schools drew inspiration from a long tradition of Indian painting which can be traced back to the Buddhist cave paintings of Ajanta in 200 B.C.

The Mughal rulers of India never tried to supplant Hindu Indian culture with their own Islamic traditions. After conquering India, Mughal emperors imported Persian miniature artists to work in their courts. These artists in turn trained resident craftsmen who eventually assimilated certain characteristics of the native Indian schools (Rajput) into their works. It is this synthesis of Persian miniature painting (Persia was part of the Mongol Empire in the 13th century) with Rajput painting which makes up the Mughal style of Indian painting. (See numbers 9, 10).

Before discussing the basic differences between Mughal and Rajput styles, common characteristics of both schools should first be mentioned. The artists were for the most part anonymous craftsmen who executed their works in the court workshops of their chief patrons -- the Indian princes (Rajas) and the imperial

rulers of the Mughal Empire. Recent research has shown that preliminary sketches and basic outlines of these paintings were often executed (usually with a very fine brush made up of one or two hairs froma young squirrel) by a draftsman, while the final painting, particularly the broad areas of color, was added by another artist.[1]

As with European medieval and Persian miniatures, Indian miniatures started out as manuscript illumination. However, the Indian painted image eventually became independent of the text, and was placed in books or portfolios to serve as pure illustration for the contemplation and enjoyment of the nobility. Thus, Indian miniature painting with the exception of folk painting (see no. 3) was never intended for popular consumption. Themes common to both Mughal and Rajput painting were portraits of rulers and courtesans and the every day pleasures and adventures of the court: ceremonies, hunts, battles, love making, and musical entertainment.

Although Mughal and Rajput artists greatly influenced one another, the differences between these two styles are considerable. Rajput painting, which makes up the majority of works in this exhibition, was practiced in two principal areas of central Northern India: Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills. Each of these areas was divided into a number of states possessing their own distinct artistic styles (see map). Although the

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1. Pal, Pratapaditya and Glenn, Catherine, The Senuous Line. Indian drawings from the Paul F. Walter Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, 1976, p. 5.

technique and coloring of Rajput painting is very much indebted to Persian manuscript illumination, the very sensuous and rhythmic line used to delineate human forms, and the decorative, symbolic use of color, are indigenous characteristics of all native Indian painting.

Compared to Mughal painting Rajput forms are less naturalistic and detailed. In general, they offer more of a symbolic interpretation which appeals primarily to the viewers' emotions rather than the intellect. Such a sensuous and romantic effect is partially the result of the predominant themes in Rajput painting: Hindu love poetry, illustrations of mood expressed by Hindu musical modes (Ragamala series), and the imaginative and exotic exploits of the Hindu gods (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) and their numerous incarnations.

On the other hand the more precise, literal, and naturalistic rendition of Mughal forms was better suited to the secular subject matter of its works. The Mughals were primarily concerned with providing an accurate narration of the sumptuous court life of the Empire in India rather than any spiritual concerns relating to their Islamic faith and literature. Even though Mughal painting was chiefly derived from the highly developed tradition of Persian manuscript art, the desire to capture a realistic appearance of things led its artists to turn away from the two-dimentional space, stylized flat surface patterns and profusion of microscopic detail associated with the Persian

style. It should be noted, however, that Persian, Mughal and Rajput styles are all considered unrealistic according to Western artistic norms.

Although this exhibition can only begin to touch upon the basic elements of Indian painting of a specific time period it will hopefully give the viewer a respect for the very fine and exacting workmanship inherent in the art of the miniature.

Caroline Wistar, Curator

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CHECK-LIST

The principle area of India is listed first, followed by the provincial school within the area. (See red underlining on map.)

RAJPUT PAINTING (Native Indian)

Numbers 1-4, 9 illustrate the heroic Hindu epic, The Ramayana. It exemplifies the triumph of good over evil as demonstrated by the adventures of "Rama" (the seventh incarnation of the Hindu god, "Vishnu") against the demon king, "Ravanna." With the assistance of his brother, "Lakshamana," monkey deity, "Hanuman," and an army of bears, the good Rama fights Ravanna, who abducted his loyal wife, "Sita." Rama is eventually the victor and returns with his wife to his home capital of Ayodhya to become King.

1. Punjab Hills (Pahari). Kangra, early 19th century

   Visit to A Holy Man

   Gouache (watercolor mixed with gum arabic to make the pigment opaque)

   11 x 15¼ ins. 0-1977-3

2. Rajasthan. Kotah, c. 1840

   Rama Enthroned with Sita as He Receives Hanuman

   Watercolor

   6-3/4 x 9¼ ins. 0-1977-1

3. Rajasthan. Paithon, early 19th century

   Rama and Lakshamana Aiming Bows at an Adversary in Horse-drawn Chariot

   Gouache

   11-3/4 x 16-5/8 ins. 0-1977-6

   This piece, possibly a copy of an earlier painting, is an example of the work of village folk painters who avoided the influence of higher cultures, preferring a more simplified, bold energetic format in order to relate traditional legends to simple folk.

4. Eastern India. Banares, c. 1620-30

The Monkey and Bear Troops of Rama in Combat with Ravanna's Army of Demons

Gouache

6 x 10-3/4 ins. 0-1977-5

5. Rajasthan. Jodhpur, late 18th century

Maharajah Suigh of Jodhpur Snorking a Hookah as he Rides a Brown Stallion

Gouache with gold gilt

$11\frac{1}{2}$ x $9\frac{1}{2}$ ins. 0-1977-4

6. Rajasthan. Mewar, c. 1740

Warriors Fighting on a Hillside with Courtiers and Maiden Seated in Discussion

From a Pancha Tantra Series. Sanskrit writing.

Gouache

10 x 16-1/8 ins. 0-1977-7

7. Rajasthan. Jodhpur, late 18th century

Ragini Kamod (describes the mood of a minor Hindu musical mode (ragini))

Brush drawing pounced for transfer. Sanskrit writing.

$9\frac{1}{2}$ x 4-3/4 ins. 77-P-8

8. Rajasthan. Kotah or Bundi, first half of 18th century

Lady Peering over Her Right Shoulder

Ink with touches of orange wash

$5\frac{1}{2}$ x 3-1/16 ins. 77-P-9

MUGHAL PAINTINGS

9. Southern Mughal. 18th century

Rama, Assisted by His Brother and the Monkey Diety, Hanuman, Uses a Magic Weapon to Shoot the Wicked Ravanna

Gouache

5-3/4 x 3-7/8 ins. (sight) 0-1980-1

10. Mughal, early 17th century

Portrait of a Courtier

Brush drawing

$6\frac{1}{2}$ x $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins. 0-1977-2

11. Rajasthan. Mewar, c. 1762

Rana Ari Singh (King of Vdaipur) With His Favorite Queen, Attended by Female Servants

Pl. 12. Reproduction on cover of Indian Painting by Mohinder Singh, Randhawa and John Kenneth Galbraith

12. Rajasthan. Datia, 2nd half of the 18th century

Scene from A Story of Krishna

Sanskrit writing (the official ancient literary language of India -- now extinct)

Gouache

11-3/4 x 8-11/16 ins. **

13. Rajasthan. Mewar, early 18th century

Bhairar Raga - A Prince Being Waited Upon And Annointed from a Ragamala set

Gouache

11-5/8 x 8-1/8 ins. **

14. Punjab Hills. Pahari, c. 1840?

A Ruler Seated Under A Canopy Receiving a Delegation

Gouache

9 x 5 ins. **

15. Persian. Bukhave (?), early 16th century

King Enthroned

From a manuscript of Sa'di written in Nastaliq script

Gouache

$8\frac{1}{4}$ x 5-5/8 ins. **

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